

BEYOND THE CLOSET? THE TRENDS AND VISIBILITY OF HOMOSEXUALITY COVERAGE IN MALAYSIAN NEWSPAPERS, 1998 – 2012

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ABSTRACT

Homosexuality issues in Malaysia started to gain considerable attention from the mainstream news media after the political dispute of Anwar Ibrahim and his sodomy allegation in 1998. Since then, the topic of homosexuality was discussed widely in the news media and it has given the public a medium to communicate and popularize homosexuality in the country. However, there is a relatively little study that investigates homosexuality issue specifically on their trends and pattern in the Malaysian newspaper. This study attempt to track and analyse the trend and visibility of the homosexuality coverage from the Malaysian newspapers particularly from the controlled and government-oriented newspapers of *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*. This study employed content analysis study to frame the textual evidence of emerging trends on homosexuality for the fifteen years of study, from 1998 to 2012 which was reported in the newspapers. The result revealed that there is a growing visibility of homosexuality issues in the Malaysian newspapers with socio-cultural-political aspects that have some degree of influence on how issues about homosexuality were narrated in the newspaper. The result also subtly reflected the ongoing influence of control by the dominant Malay political hegemony in the country. This study contributes to the knowledge on the understanding of the news media's role in shaping the parameters of public debate on such a controversial issue within the democratic and cultural politics in the country.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Media, News Coverage, Content Analysis, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Media has become an important source of information and act as one of the essential providers for knowledge and creator of the social realities (Hardt, 2004; Morgan, 2009). Media also works as the main carrier of ideas, thought and opinions. As a content producer, the editor and journalist's views through media play a significant role in shaping and reforming people daily lives and eventually create their perception from the images and text they see and read. Ultimately the media content may influence people decision making and their ideological beliefs (England et al., 2011).

The content of the media and its nature of message are usually decided by the organisation of the media or its affiliation. This includes the setting of the agendas, deciding on what is deemed important and whom to include and exclude (Carter & Steiner, 2004). The media reflects and reproduces the dominant ideology of their times and work through the prevailing ways on how it looking at things and making sense of the world. The media achieves this by framing on event or events in such a manner that it will hold public interest.

This study focuses on the homosexuality subject in Malaysian news media and aims to analyse the trends and pattern of the coverage. The term “homosexual” refers to the sexual behaviour or attraction between people of the similar sex or sexual orientation as having a sexual or romantic attraction primarily or exclusively to members of one’s own sex (Richard, 2009). Until 1974, homosexuality was considered as a mental illness but redefined as a person’s sexual, mental, emotional and social interest in a person of the same sex whether may or may not be manifest in their explicit behaviour (American Psychological Association, 1980).

By focusing on the two mainstream Malay language newspapers, this study investigates the homosexuality coverage for fifteen years period from 1998 to 2012. Both newspapers are the leading Malay language newspapers that largely target Malay readers with the highest circulation and readership (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2013). The newspapers were own and control by the government and have a policy of supporting the government agenda. Hence, these should inform something about the coverage as well as how they construct the social reality of homosexuals in the country.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Malaysia is a country that does not recognize same-sex unions and homosexual sex is illegal. Those convicted with “gross indecency” between same-sex can be punished with fines, imprisonment of up to 20 years and caned (Hamidah, 2004), a law which is to be believed was originated from the colonial-era laws that push sodomy. At the same time, Malaysia also practising Syariah law that applies to Malaysian Muslim which is much clearer in criminalizing homosexuality. As a consequence, homosexuality has often been seen as a criminal in Malaysia.

The Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has made it a clear remark on homosexuality that it has not being recognized and same-sex marriage cannot be legalised, “In Malaysia, there are some things we cannot accept, even though it is seen as human rights in the Western countries. We cannot accept homosexuality, marriage between men and men, women and women” (*The Star*, 19 June 2019). Meanwhile, the Deputy Prime Minister Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail also seen to show her equal firm on the stance of homosexuality to have remained closeted (*The Star*, 19 June 2019).

However, regardless of the vast denunciation towards homosexuality in Malaysia, homosexuality issues in Malaysia have been around for relatively some period, but their stories seldom get full attention from the local news media. (Ho, 1998). It is only after the political storm which involved Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia then Deputy Prime Minister for sodomy allegation in September 1998, Malaysian news media started to have an open discussion on homosexuality topics which has given the public a medium to communicate and popularize homosexuality in the country (Alagappan, 2009). Anwar Ibrahim sodomy trial creates a basis of the extensive debate on homosexuality in the country with the excessive coverage from the local news outlet. Two years of regular references to Anwar Ibrahim’s sodomy charge since 1998 appeared to left huge impact towards homosexuality subject in Malaysia (Liebhold, 2001) particularly in the Malaysian news media scene.

News media played a critical role in constructing homosexuality issues. It is said that the homosexuality coverage often received intensely resented from the Malaysian public especially when it involved Malay Muslim people. Homosexuality coverage usually is written stereotypically and reported in sensationalized ways that conflates homosexuality with controversy and sometimes suffering or uses their identity to make fun and humiliation (Lipkin, 1994). Unknowingly, issues surrounding homosexuality has made several attentions grabbing headlines news and received extensive panics attack among the Malaysian public. For example, in January 2011, there was a public outcry following the release of a clip from the video-sharing network YouTube of a 32 years old gay Malay man name Azwan Ismail. From the released video, Azwan Ismail declares his sexuality openly that later received multiple death threats and violence as a result of announcing his gay sexuality (Shah, 2011).

Another example of cases surrounding homosexuality is a same-sex marriage controversy that leads to the condemnation from the public and intense argument from the newspapers between Malay Muslim men name Ariff Alfian Rosli with his English partner in Ireland that triggered outrage specifically among Malay public. Finally, there was the resumption of Anwar's new sodomy trial (BBC News, 2011), this time on charges that surfaced in 2008. Most of these controversies issues around homosexuality were being sensationalised in most of the news media in Malaysia as well as in international media.

Departed from this, by taking such contention into the media backdrop, several questions could further be extended and adapted to the attitude and expression of the media on homosexuality issues. While there is relatively little literature about homosexuality studies underpinning the studies of news media within Malaysian landscape, the disputes on the homosexuality subject in the country demonstrate curiosity on how the subject being raised in the local news media. However, there have been some significant studies with the current entrants (see Alagappan and Kaur, 2009; Jerome, 2011; Suriati and Azilah, 2012).

Hence, it is worth studying how homosexuality coverage in Malaysia is portrayed because many open questions can be explored specifically into the cultural production of the news in portraying a sensitive issue like homosexuality in the country. This study can also help cast light on the role of the media in shaping and tackling sensitive issues concerning homosexuality in Malaysia. Thus, a thorough study of coverage on homosexuality issues is necessary to understand the role of news media in shaping the parameters of public debate on a controversial issue in democratic and cultural politics.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, the analysis of the homosexuality coverage was investigated using quantitative content analysis. In general, the method of quantitative content analysis was typically used to measure the frequency of the text. Berelson (1952) asserted that content analysis is also applicable for analyzing and describing patterns in the media content and illustrating the extent and presence of certain issues, frames and stereotypes in a large news corpus. Content analysis study offers a powerful tool for the researcher to investigate the "big pictures" that shape cultural meanings and "the contours of the ideological environment" (Thomas, 1994) particularly in this study, on the understanding of trends of homosexuality issues in Malaysia. By conducting a content analysis

study, it will also work to determine which questions and aspects of homosexuality issues that have received much significant attention from the newspapers and how it will reflect the interpretation among the public.

Data Sampling

Two mainstream Malay language newspapers were selected for this study: *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*. Their presence in the market was taken as the most important aspect for the selection including their high circulation and consistent publication. According to the audit report from Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), *Utusan Malaysia* entitled for the highest number of circulation for Malay newspapers nationwide (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2013) for the year 2013, in which the number of the newspapers distributed around Malaysia is 182,704 copies daily in average. However, *Berita Harian* has higher numbers in the term of readership with the total of 947,000 for the year 2013 to be compared with *Utusan Malaysia* which only has 563,000 of readership.

Time Frame and Data Collection Site

This study looks at coverage for fifteen years from 1998 to 2012. The year of 1998 is selected as homosexuality topic began to become the focal subject of Malaysian mainstream news media after the year 1998 because of Anwar Ibrahim's sodomy accusation's trial that resulted in the attention garnered from the local news media (Alagappan & Kaur, 2009) stated. The decision to choose these periods was also because of the chaotic, yet interesting period to study based on the events surrounding homosexuality in the country and to obtain a more in-depth perspective about the issues. Another reason for choosing these fifteen years periods was also to visualize how the pattern and dispute of the homosexuality coverage from both newspapers evolved through time.

Data Collection Procedure

News coverage with word 'homosexual', 'gay' and 'lesbian' was scoured in both newspapers. Since both *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* newspapers were using the Malay language as a medium, the Malay translation and spelling of the word 'homosexual' as *homoseksual* and 'homosexuality' as *homoseksualiti* were used to locate the news coverage. The unit of analysis was the individual coverage or news article on homosexuality stories.

Coding Categorisation

One of the important aspects of conducting a quantitative content analysis study is categorisation. Most importantly, the coding should be functional and the system of categories must be manageable. The coding categorisation was designed in a few steps. First, the researcher analyses the existing set of coding categorisation from the previous study conducted by Alagappan and Kaur (2009) to get an overview of coding categorisation construction. Then, the comparison was made with the selected 110 coverage that was picked randomly for the pre-pilot study. The list of the coding was later adapted and modified. The coding categorisation was designed and altered based

on the purpose of this study and was tested twice as Stempel (1989) points out the set of coding categories should emphasize the aims of the study.

The coding categorisation was designed and altered based on the purpose of this study and was tested twice as Stempel (1989) points out the set of coding categories should emphasize the aims of the study. The frequencies of homosexuality coverage for the fifteen periods of years was then divided into several categories which are the volume of the homosexuality coverage, the size of the coverage, the tone of the coverage, the placement of the coverage and the actors appeared in the coverage.

The first category under the frequency of homosexuality coverage is the size of the coverage. The size of the coverage has been categorized as “big”, “medium”, “small” and “very small” depending on the article length. Big coverage is the articles that have more than 1500 words (more than a page of the newspaper) while medium coverage consists of 1001 to 1499 words (one page of the newspaper). Meanwhile, the length for small coverage is from 501 to 999 words (two-third of a page of the newspaper) and very small coverage are articles that have below 500 words (one-third of a page of a newspaper). Table 1 below illustrates the size of the coverage and the characteristics of the word length.

Table 1: Size of the homosexuality coverage and numbers of words

Size of Coverage	Word Length
Very Small	Below 500 words
Small	Between 501 to 999 words
Medium	Between 1000 to 1499 words
Big	More than 1500 words

The following category observed the tone of the homosexuality coverage. The coding scheme identifies three tones of the coverage which are opposing, supportive and not available. The characteristics of the opposing tone are coverage that describes it as deviant, negative activities, bad behaviour, against the norms, create an outrage by the public and unacceptable by law, religion and local norm. This also includes tones that strike and spread fear, panic and fright about homosexuality in the country. The characteristics of the supportive tone are the coverage that compassionates towards homosexuality and describes homosexuality where it was seen as basic human rights, equality and freedom of choice. There is also a category for the not available tone of coverage, which described as no explanation made by the coverage on the homosexuality issue. Table 2 below illustrates the tones of the coverage and the characteristics.

Table 2: Tone of the homosexuality coverage and its characteristics

Tone of Coverage	Characteristics
Opposing	News coverage that describe homosexuality as deviant, abnormal, negative activities, bad behavior, against the norms, create an outrage by the public and unaccepted by religion and local norm.
Supportive	News coverage that describe homosexuality where it was seen as basic human rights, equality and freedom of choice and has compassionate towards homosexuality.

Not available	No explanation made by the news coverage on homosexuality issue.
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The following category is the identification of the newspaper placement of the homosexuality coverage. While each newspaper has its own system of identifying and categorizing the sections, all the sections are standardized for the purposes of this study into the following section: national news, editorial, feature stories, international news, special column by in-house or guest author, special column of interview section as well as letters to the editors.

The placement of the homosexuality coverage can provide their views and inform the decisions of these newspapers make in term of the coverage of different aspect on homosexuality topic in the country. For example, if the homosexuality coverage is placed in the national news section, it can be assumed that the issue was perceived to have local implications or significance towards the nation-state attention. Table 3 below illustrates the placement of homosexuality coverage and its characteristics.

Table 3: Placement of the homosexuality coverage and its characteristics

Placement of the Coverage	Characteristics
National News	Coverage in the few first page of the newspaper. Mostly coverage on event and current issue about homosexuality which was happened in the country.
Feature Stories	Coverage about homosexuality from real life experience in a feature-oriented style.
Editorial	Written opinions of the editor on homosexuality issues.
International News	Coverage about homosexuality which happened outside Malaysia.
Special Column	Coverage about homosexuality which was written by in-house or guest author.
Interview	A column which published an interview transcribe between the invited guest and the newspaper about homosexuality.
Letters to Editors	A column that published notes or letters written by the general readers about homosexuality.

The final category of the coding categorisation is the actors appeared in the homosexuality coverage in the newspapers. The actors appeared were act as the source of the news. The source of the news was defined as words that appeared from those directly or indirectly quoted in the coverage. The analysis of the actors used to speak on the issue is significant because it can reveal the embodiment of certain individuals or organizations that commonly selected by the newspapers to speak on homosexuality issues and the kinds of the confine topics. By doing this too, it will undoubtedly show on who were given the prime powers to speak on the homosexuality issue which indirectly may influence the general readers.

There are six main actors which were emerged in the homosexuality coverage of both newspapers. The actors are including the government officials, non-government organization, religious organization, academician, politician and other individual's namely legal practitioner, counsellor, authority and more. Table 4 below outline the list of the actors and the example that is

not limited from the list given which appeared on the coverage on homosexuality from both newspapers.

Table 4: List of actors from the homosexuality coverage and its examples

Type of Actors	Example of the Actors
Government Official	Prime Minister Deputy Minister State Chief Minister Ministry of Prime Minister's Department Ministry of Education Malaysia Secretary Politic of Prime Minister
Non-government Organization	Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (ISMA) Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa Malaysia (Perkasa) Jaringan Melayu Malaysia (JMM) Parti Kesejahteraan Insan Tanah Air (KITA) Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) Gabungan Pelajar Melayu Semenanjung (GPMS) Pergerakan Belia India Muslim Malaysia (Gepima) Chinese Society Organization of Ampang
Religion Organization	Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) Wilayah Persekutuan Islamic Religious Council Selangor Islamic Religious Council Buddha Association of Petaling Jaya Malaysian Association of Hindu Sangam National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) Malaysian Hindu Association
Academician	Former Vice Chancellor of Universiti Malaya Professor from Department of Fiqh, Islamic Studies Academy, Universiti Malaya (UM) Associate Professor from Faculty of Law, Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM) Associate Professor from Usuluddin and Comparative Religion Studies, Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM) Associate Professor from Medical Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Hospital (HUKM)
Politician	Deputy President of United Malay National Organization (UMNO) Deputy President of Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) Women's Youth of UMNO Member of Parliament PAS Spiritual Leader Secretary of Dewan Pemuda Chief PAS

Others	Former politician Authority Religious individual Counsellor Psychiatrist Legal practitioners Activist
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Some of the limitation and issue in constructing this coding categorisation was the complicatedness in getting a comparable measurement as variables on homosexuality issues that were seen as interconnected with each other. It is challenging to look upon all the issues as one entity and to put all the issues in a list is quite an unrealistic matter to do so. Therefore, it took a long time to get a reliable coding categorisation of content analysis.

FINDINGS

General Distribution of Homosexuality Coverage

From the amount of the 463 selected homosexuality coverage from both newspapers, the researcher distributed the coverage to the yearly basis for the fifteen years from 1998 to 2012. Figure 1 below summarized the overall news text tabulation of the homosexuality coverage in *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* for the fifteen years of 1998 to 2012.

Figure 1: The distributions of homosexuality coverage in *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* from 1998 to 2012 (n = 463)

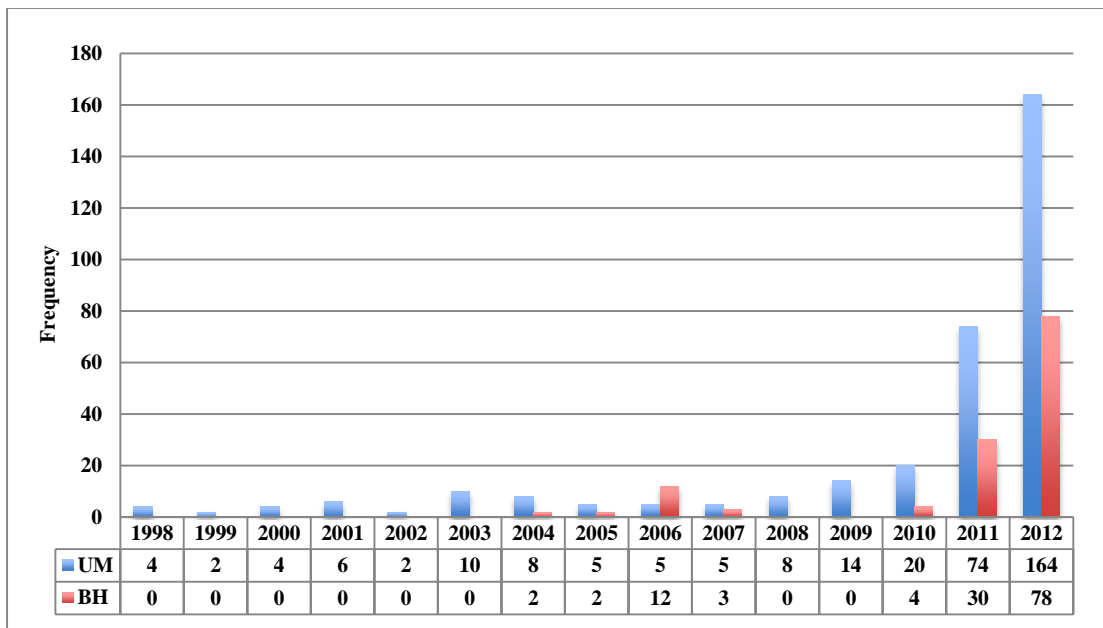


Figure 1 above shows a significant difference in the trend of homosexuality coverage throughout the fifteen-year of the study period. In general, it can be highlighted that the year 2012 remarked as the year with the highest homosexuality coverage for both *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*.

In average, there is 30 coverage per year, (2.5 coverage per month) from 1998 to 2012 for each newspaper. *Utusan Malaysia* steadily reported on homosexuality for each year albeit the inconsistency of the numbers. The least number is only two coverage, which is in the 1999 and 2002 respectively and the highest number of homosexuality coverage is 164 coverage (35.4 per cent) in 2012. *Utusan Malaysia* by average published 22 coverage each year from 1998 to 2012.

It is important to highlight that the number of homosexuality coverage from the *Utusan Malaysia* rises dramatically started in 2010 to 2012. The number of the coverage growth to almost four times higher in 2011 than the year before, which is 74 number of coverage (16 per cent) in 2011 to compare with 20 coverage (4.32 per cent) in 2010. Again, the amount of coverage rises dramatically in 2012 which indicate 164 coverage (35.42 per cent) and that is almost more than fifty per cent increased than 2011. In average, in 2012 there is around 13 homosexuality coverage in *Utusan Malaysia*.

Homosexuality coverage from the *Utusan Malaysia* published consistently for the first five years from 1998 to 2002 with six coverage (1.3 per cent) in 2001, four coverage (0.9 per cent) in the 1998 and 2000 and two coverage (0.4 per cent) each on the 1999 and 2002. Nonetheless, the number of the coverage upsurge to ten coverage (2.16 per cent) in 2003 before it gradually decrease to nine coverage (1.94 per cent) in the 2004 and five coverage (1.07 per cent) for three consecutive years of 2005, 2006 and 2007. The number of the coverage then increased from 2007 to 2010 with five coverage (1.07 per cent) in 2007, eight coverage (1.73 per cent) in 2008, 14 coverage (3.02 per cent) in the 2009 and increase to 20 coverage (4.32 per cent) in 2010.

Meanwhile, there are small numbers of homosexuality coverage for *Berita Harian* in general throughout the fifteen years to compare with *Utusan Malaysia*. There are nine out of the fifteen years that showed zero homosexuality coverage while the highest number of homosexuality coverage is 78 (16.8 per cent) in 2012 which is less than fifty per cent than coverage from *Utusan Malaysia*. For the first six years, there is zero homosexuality coverage. Again, the scenario was repeated in the year 2008 and year 2009. In average, *Berita Harian* published around 8 homosexuality coverage each year from 1998 to 2012.

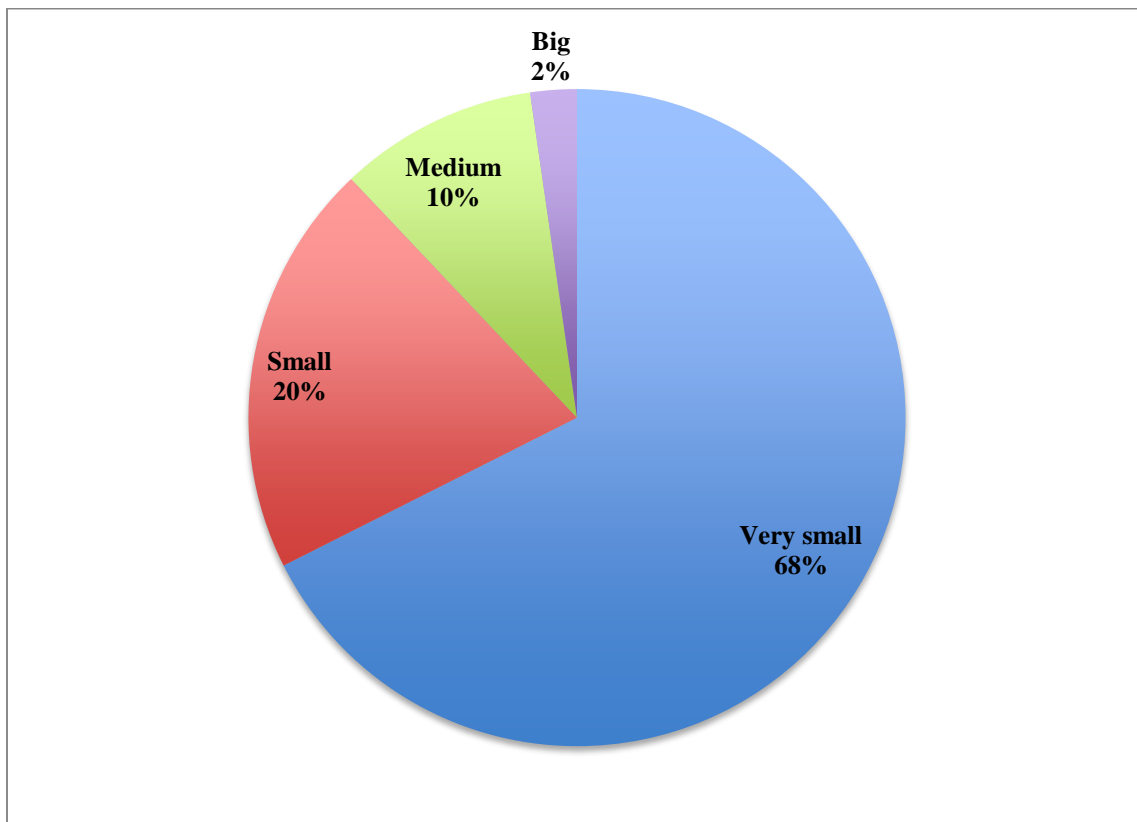
Although the number of the homosexuality coverage in *Berita Harian* showed a sudden rise in 2006 for 12 coverage (2.6 per cent) from only two (0.43 per cent) in the previous year, the number had tremendously dropped to only three news coverage (0.65 per cent) for the year 2007. In 2010, the number raised to four news coverage (0.86 per cent) after zero coverage published for two consecutive years in 2008 and 2009. It was later jumped dramatically to eight times higher from only four to 30 coverage (6.48 per cent) in 2011. Again, in 2012 the number of coverage elevated drastically that reached 78 coverage (16.85 per cent), which is more than two times higher than the amount in 2011.

As a summary, it is showed that the year 2012 showed the highest number of homosexuality coverage for both newspapers throughout the fifteen years of study. It is also demonstrated that *Utusan Malaysia* placed numbers of homosexuality coverage to be compared with *Berita Harian*. The following section will discuss the size of homosexuality coverage in both newspapers.

Size of the Coverage

This study also identified the size of homosexuality coverage. By identifying the size, it can determine how much attention was given on the homosexuality issue by the newspapers. The reason to inquire about the size of the homosexuality coverage is also to reflect if the homosexuality issue was deemed to be significant as being highlighted in the newspapers. The size was range between the very small size to the large size. Figure 2 below illustrates the result of the size of the coverage on homosexuality issues in both Malay language newspapers from 1998 to the year 2012.

Figure 2: The size of homosexuality coverage in *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* from the 1998 to 2012 (n = 463)



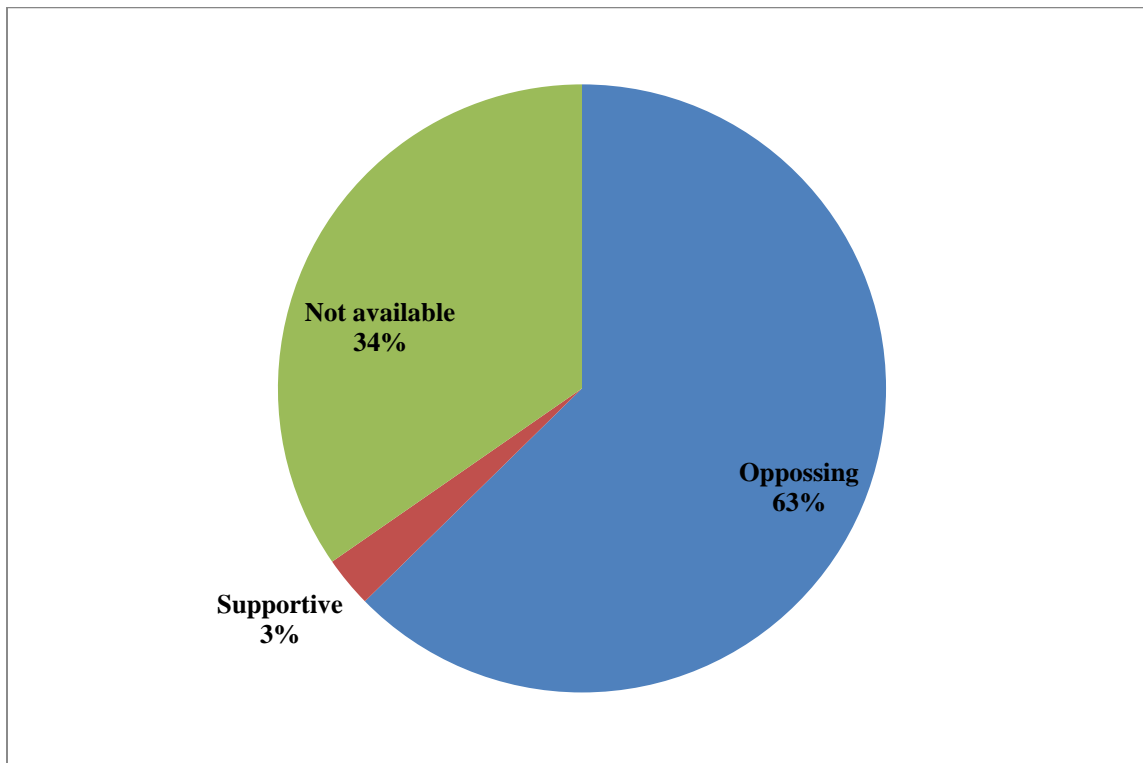
Based on Figure 2 above, it can be informed that homosexuality coverage is predominantly under the category of very small in size with 314 numbers (68 per cent). It was followed by the category of small coverage with 92 numbers (20 per cent). Meanwhile, 46 numbers (10 per cent) of homosexuality coverage is under the category of medium size. Lastly, only 11 numbers of homosexuality coverage (2 per cent) are large coverage in size which is more than 1500 words per coverage.

From the result, it is obvious that homosexuality issues are still getting intense coverage, despite that was considered to be an offensive subject in the country that can be discussed openly. The following section will discuss on the tones of the coverage.

Tones of the Coverage

This study also identified the tone of the coverage and examines its standpoint toward homosexuality issue. There is three types of the coverage tone which is opposing, supportive and not available. Figure 3 below illustrates the distribution news text on the tones of the homosexuality coverage in the newspapers.

Figure 3: The tone of homosexuality coverage in the *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* from the 1998 to 2012 (n = 463)



From Figure 3 above, it is clear that the numbers of coverage opposing homosexuality showed the highest number of percentage as being expected. The number of coverage which opposing homosexuality is 292 coverage (63 per cent) while 14 coverage (3 per cent) provides a positive content on homosexuality. Meanwhile, there is 157 coverage (34 per cent) on homosexuality that neither has positive and negative tones on homosexuality.

The following section will discuss where the most coverage on homosexuality was placed throughout the section of the newspapers in both Malay language newspapers.

Placement of the Coverage

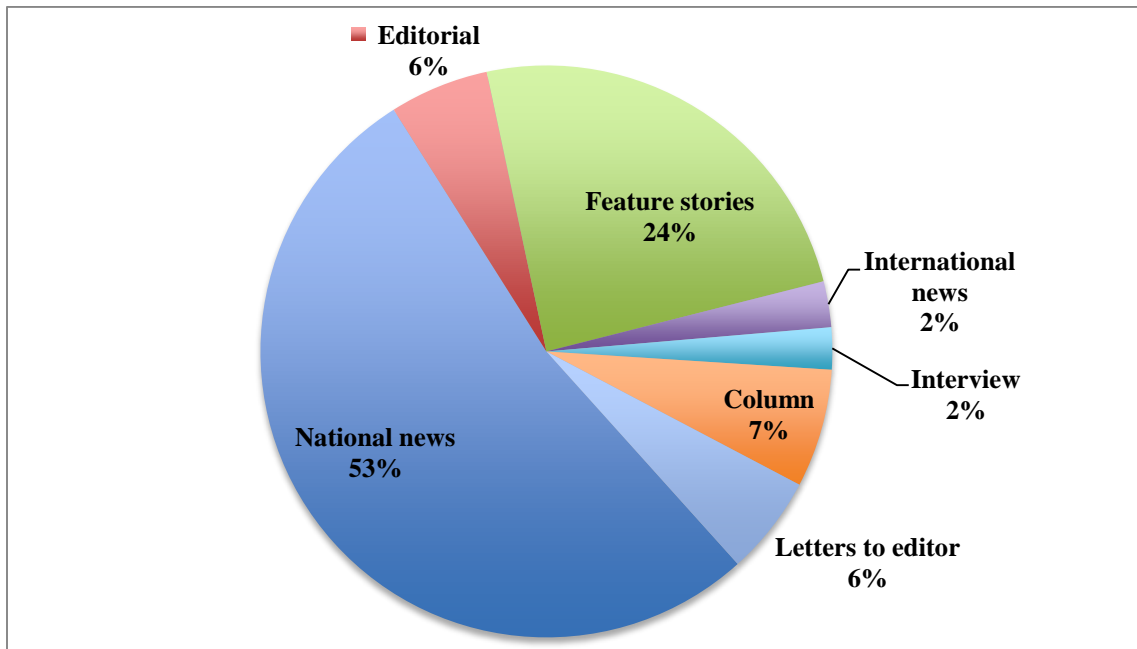
Throughout the examination of the overall news data tabulation on the homosexuality coverage, the news section of the homosexuality stories was placed was also identified. The researcher seeks to outline all homosexuality coverage according to the section identified for both newspapers. In this study, the examination on the placement of the section in the newspaper on the issue surrounding homosexuality is necessary because it could provide how significance's the coverage is in term of the news value and how's it is possibly impacting the readers. The study on the placement of the section can also determine the newsworthy for that particular issue in that particular period.

For the purposes of this study, all sections are standardized into the following sections: national news, editorial, feature stories, international news, interview, column and letters to editors. The placement of the coverage into several sections shows the various significant aspects of homosexuality issues in Malaysia. For instance, if the homosexuality stories are placed in the news section of national news, it is perhaps was deemed to be relevant for the attention of the nation-state's audience.

To identify the trends and patterns on homosexuality coverage in term of the placement of the section in the newspaper, the researcher classified all the selected coverage of 463 from both Malay language newspapers according to the seven sections in the newspapers mentioned earlier.

Figure 4 below illustrates the amount of the homosexuality coverage according to the type of the section in the newspapers in both *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* for the period of fifteen years from the year 1998 to the year 2012.

Figure 4: The section of the newspapers for the homosexuality coverage in *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* from 1998 to 2012 (n = 463)



Based from the Figure 4 above, it is clear that the national section gives the largest number of the homosexuality coverage with the total of 244 coverage (53 per cent) from both *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* throughout the fifteen years. In average, there are 66 coverage in each section of the newspapers. Meanwhile, the least number of the section that published the homosexuality coverage is from the section of interview and international news, which indicated only eleven and twelve coverage (two per cent) respectively for both newspapers.

The second highest of the section with homosexuality coverage is the feature stories that provide 113 coverage (24 per cent) which is more than fifty percent less than the national news section. It was followed by the special column section by columnists with 31 coverage (seven per cent). Meanwhile, the section of editorial news and letter to editor equally provide 26 homosexuality coverage (six per cent) respectively.

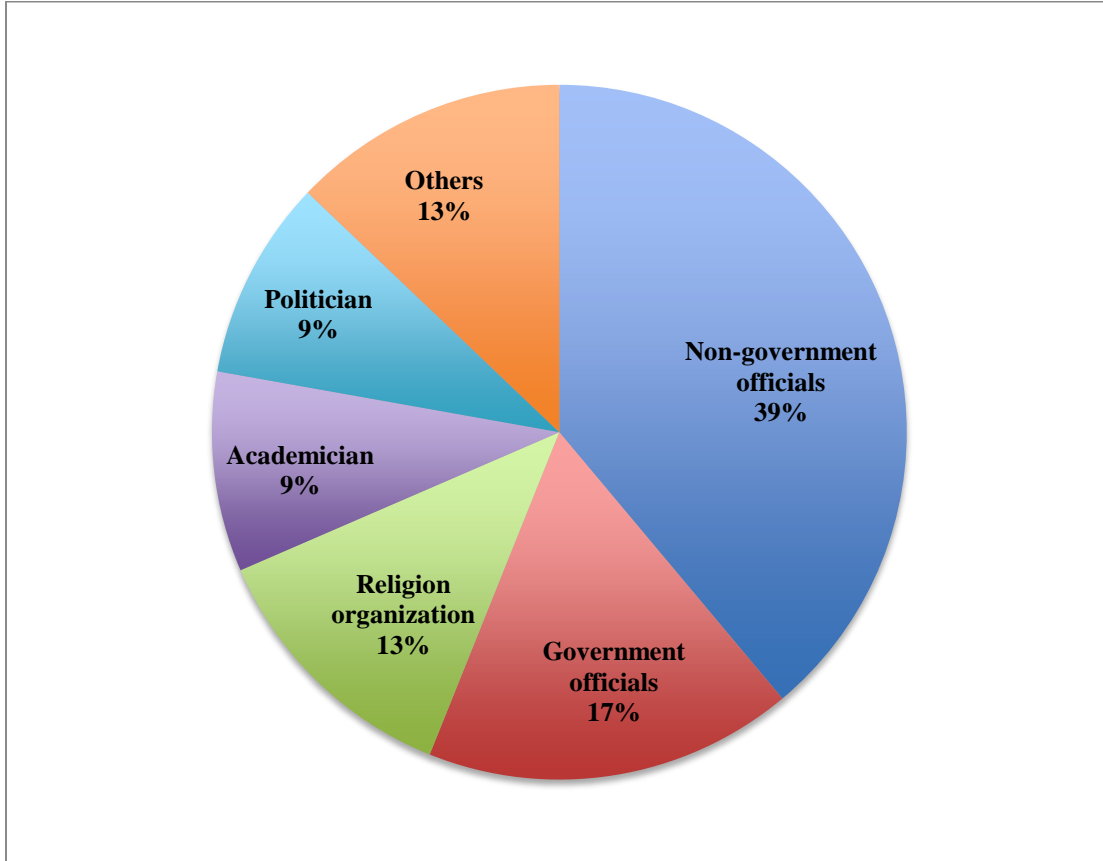
Actors Appeared in the Coverage

For this study, the researcher also seek to identify and quantify the distribution of the actors appeared across the homosexuality coverage from both newspapers. The actor's appeared in the coverage were referred to those who are quoted on homosexuality issues. The use of synonyms and references to similar actors is used to determining these actors of the news items. An actor has to be at the minimum focus of an entire paragraph within a story to be coded as an actor. The actors are including the government officials, non-government organization, religion organization, academician, politician and others individual's namely legal practitioner, counselor, authority and more.

Throughout the examination of the actors appeared in the homosexuality coverage, the researcher quantified the amount for the period of fifteen years from the year 1998 to 2012 for both newspapers. There were 271 numbers identified in *Utusan Malaysia* newspapers throughout the period and 166 numbers were found in *Berita Harian* and that make the total of actors appeared in the newspapers for homosexuality issues is 419 numbers. The amount was accumulated ranging from the six actors mentioned earlier which is from the government official, religion organization, non-government organization, academician, politician and others voices.

Figure 5 below illustrated the overall number of the actors appeared in both *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* throughout fifteen years period of study which involved in the homosexuality coverage.

Figure 5: The actors appeared on homosexuality coverage in *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* from 1998 to 2012 ($n = 419$)



From the Figure 5 above, it is showed that the highest number of the actors appeared in both newspapers is the non-government officials that revealed 163 numbers (38 per cent) while the least number are from academician and politician that provides 39 numbers (nine per cent) respectively. Meanwhile, the second highest of the actors appeared by the newspapers is government official that gives 72 numbers (17 per cent). The rest of the actors are from the others category which provides 54 numbers (13 per cent) and actors from religion organization provide 52 numbers (13 per cent).

The discussion on the actors appeared on homosexuality issues is also quantified within the two newspapers. Actors from the non-government organization from *Utusan Malaysia* provides a total of 102 numbers (24 per cent) and *Berita Harian* showed a total of 61 numbers (14 per cent). The second highest actors appeared in both newspapers on homosexuality coverage is from the government official that provide 72 numbers (17 per cent). For this category of actors, *Utusan Malaysia* provides the total number of 45 numbers (11 per cent) meanwhile *Berita Harian* gives 27 number (6.5 per cent). Meanwhile, the actors from the category of others place third with 54 numbers (12.8 per cent) from both newspapers with *Berita Harian* showed 21 numbers (5 per cent) and *Utusan Malaysia* provide 28 numbers (6.7 per cent).

The actors from the religion organization in Malaysia were identified to be the fourth highest from both newspapers to speak on homosexuality. Both newspapers gives 52 of numbers (12 per cent) with *Utusan Malaysia* indicates 40 numbers of actors (9.5 per cent) and *Berita Harian* showed 12 numbers (2.9 per cent) for the same category. Meanwhile, actors from both academician and politician provide an unlike position in *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian* respectively. In *Utusan Malaysia*, academician placed fifth with 28 numbers (6.7 per cent) while politician indicate 23 numbers (5.5 per cent) which are the least number of all six types of the actors. However, for *Berita Harian*, the actors from the category of politician place the fifth position with 16 numbers (3.8 per cent) while academician reveals only 11 numbers (2.6 per cent).

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that the *Utusan Malaysia* provides higher number of actors to be compared with *Berita Harian*. It is also demonstrated that the year 2012 indicates higher volumes for all six categories of actors throughout the fifteen years from the year 1998 to year 2012 and the non-government organization reveals the higher number among the rest of especially in the year 2012. Another fascinating result also suggested that the number of actors appeared to be upsurge dramatically from the year 2010 to 2012.

DISCUSSION

Looking collectively at the result, there are some observation emerged on the distinct position of various news concern on homosexuality issues. There are growing numbers on homosexuality's coverage from both newspapers which provide significant trends throughout the fifteen years of studies. The trend on the homosexuality coverage become more obvious and received great amount of attention from these newspapers and clearly, homosexuality coverage is not being ignored. The evidence was revealed when the three significance sections from the newspapers namely national news, feature stories and editorial news provide numbers of homosexuality coverage particularly from the year 2010 to 2012. Any coverage under national news, feature stories and editorial was known to discuss current issue which regularly raised attention from the readers.

This result is consistent on what Machungo (2012) asserted that for any news placed at the front page and section such as national news or editorial news are deemed important by the journalist, editor, news organization and for the readership that the news to be is newsworthy. The high level of newsworthiness is based on the importance, urgency, sensational nature of the events, places or actors being covered (Machungo, 2012). By defining what is newsworthy, the people behind the media can control and decide what matters to the audience and their readers, by creating the categories of inclusions and exclusion, important and unimportant, relevant and irrelevant. In other words, homosexuality coverage were considered as newsworthy from the stance of the Malay language newspapers possibly to get more attention from the readers and the reason why subject on homosexuality was reckoned to be newsworthy need to be further look up.

The result on the homosexuality's trends of the growth number of coverage was also considered to be consistent on what Gasher (2007) posited that journalist and the media organizations that play their role by assigning certain events, people, institutions, problems and solutions by default to inhibit people from different social group or class to be included in

the coverage. The coverage then was slanted in the media through their routine coverage according to the interest of the newspapers' organisation and ideology.

Following the result, the trend on the actors involved in homosexuality coverage emerged from the three most significant source namely Malay based non-government organization (NGO), the government and the religious organization. Clearly, it is shown that both Malay language newspapers rely heavily on the influential individual and organisation on homosexuality issues. The actors used by both newspapers work as the central source on homosexuality coverage which also indirectly revealed the selection made of the newspaper on who are the best people to comment on homosexuality issues.

Hereby, the result on the actors involved can be related on what Erickson et. al. (1989) stated that news is a form of representations of the authority which marks their explanations to the society. News is also represented on who are the authorized knowers and represent the versions of reality from the authoritative stance. News from the authoritative sources will be accepted as the "truth" of the matter without further investigation, as it reflecting an assumption that they serve the public interest. It is also to affirm that their organization is accountable. Here, the trend of the sources used on homosexuality is adequate to inform that journalists relied on the NGOs, the government and the religious institution as a trustworthy agency and influential actors to speak on homosexuality.

These three most referred actors on homosexuality used in the newspapers were also indirectly showed the position of the institution in society. Those types of actors who hold a higher status and ranking among the public that frequently used as a source in the media were also known as "primary definers" (Hall, 1978). The higher ranked group is to be believed to have more credibility and power. Thus, their words could legitimize the news, in comparison to the lower group whose information could be partial, distorted and less trustworthy. The result on the actors used on homosexuality can also be affirmed what Fishman (1980) calls it as "bureaucratic consciousness". Through bureaucratic consciousness, journalists would normally know where to find the sources based on their common sense. Journalists select sources of information according to a "hierarchy of credibility" with the assumption that sources in a higher-ranked group know best due to their "knowledge of the truth" (Becker, 1987).

The trends of the actors appeared in the homosexuality coverage were also reflected in the ownership of the newspapers. As a government-oriented media, both *Utusan Malaysia* and *Berita Harian*, the choices of the actors used is important and crucial because it was used to maintain and uphold the power and eliminate others voices (Hall, 1978). Homosexuality issues were largely relied heavily on the government officials, Malay supremacy non-government organisations and religious institution as trustworthy agencies and influential voices. Perhaps, the sources used were consistent within the interest covered by the newspapers and was used to conserve and sustain the power and disregard others voices that potentially attempt to reach out to their niche readers. The images presented of homosexuality in the Malay language newspapers are implicitly reflected the ongoing influence of control by the dominant Malay political hegemony in the country and perhaps, homosexuality is only acceptable only when it is being depoliticized.

CONCLUSION

Although homosexuality is largely denounced as unnatural both in the Malaysian secular and sacrosanct spaces, the numbers of homosexuality coverage seen the proliferation and receive obvious attention from both mainstream newspapers. The underpinning of the dispensing news text distribution on homosexuality shed light on the growing visibility of homosexuality topics in the Malaysian newspapers that can opened up more critical avenue for future discussion and debate despite the ways that it is still remains a social taboo to be discuss openly in this Muslim-majority country.

This study was partly limited because it is covered only to the printed media and merely central on mainstream newspapers particularly Malay language newspaper as the primary text of investigation. The future scholarship may want to extend the framework of analysing other mainstream newspapers from a different language such as English language newspapers. While this study merely focuses on the period of fifteen years from the year 1998 to the year 2012, a future scholarship may extend the period of study up to the present year. Perhaps, the pattern of the trends would further illuminate different result with broader sampling. Another suggestion is to compare the numbers of the homosexuality coverage between before and after the 14th general election in 2018 to identify the trends of the coverage to uncover the potential of any politically motivated context of the discursive events.

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